

## INSIGHTS INTO MODULARITY: 753RD TANK BATTALION IN WORLD WAR II

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INSIGHTS INTO MODULARITY:  
753RD TANK BATTALION IN WORLD WAR II**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The U.S. Army is in the midst of its largest organizational change since World War II. At the heart of its transformation is its conversion to a modular, brigade-based force design. The creation of self-contained brigade combat teams, as well as modular support and functional brigades, is intended to provide a more capable and adaptable force in which units can be combined or augmented to build tailored formations to meet specific mission requirements. As the Army's modular force continues to evolve and mature so must the doctrine, leader development systems, and institutions that create and support it. Current operations provide a wealth of insights to inform this refinement. History provides insights as well, since many of the underlying concepts of modularity are not new, nor are the challenges they present. One example of early modularity can be seen in the World War II separate tank battalions, units specifically designed to be task organized to provide additional capability to infantry or other formations. This project examines the experience of one separate tank battalion and, drawing from it, suggests insights and provides recommendations for the U.S. Army's current-day modular force.



## INSIGHTS INTO MODULARITY: 753RD TANK BATTALION IN WORLD WAR II

Over the past four years the U.S. Army has struggled with its largest organizational change since World War II while engaged in protracted warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the heart of the Army's transformation efforts is the conversion of its combat divisions to a modular, brigade-based force design. The reorganization is intended to enable greater capacity for providing rapidly deployable packages, tailored to meet the specific needs of a Joint Force Commander, delivering the right Army forces at the right place and time. This approach is central to optimizing Army forces for the Combatant Commander and expanding his ability to influence his area of responsibility (AOR).<sup>1</sup>

A major thrust of the Army's transformation is the creation of self-contained brigade combat teams (BCT).<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the early 1990s, a series of studies and leadership decisions determined the brigade combat team to be the appropriate level to develop smaller, more agile combat formations. Different brigades could be combined, creating a tailored force to meet specific mission requirements which could be "plugged into" higher level headquarters of either a joint or coalition task force.<sup>3</sup>

Designed to be largely self-sufficient, stand alone combined arms organizations, the modular BCTs contain a combination of battalion-sized maneuver, fires, reconnaissance, and sustainment units. However, for most operations, the BCT will be augmented with additional capabilities in order to meet specific mission requirements. To this end, it is essential that the BCT be able to effectively accept and employ additional units, which could include maneuver, cannon or rocket artillery, aviation, air



defense, military police, civil affairs, psychological operations, combat engineers, or additional information systems or other assets.<sup>4</sup>

The Army reorganization does not stop with the combat elements; five types of modular support brigades complement the force, providing functional capabilities to the controlling headquarters. Similar to the BCTs, these modular support brigades can be mission-tailored through augmentation. They can also provide specialized capabilities to the BCTs or other headquarters.<sup>5</sup> Rounding out the Army's modular forces is a variety of functional brigades designed to fill broad support roles on a theater-wide basis.<sup>6</sup>

As the Army's modular force continues to evolve and mature so must the doctrine, leader development systems, and institutions that create and support it. Current operations provide a wealth of insights that inform the refinement of the modular force concept. The Army can look to history for insights as well, since many of the underlying concepts of modularity are not new, nor are the challenges they present. The great transformation of the U.S. Army which took place prior to and during World War II offers much worthy of consideration. One example of early modularity can be seen in the World War II development and employment of the separate tank battalions, units specifically designed to be task organized, in whole or in part, to provide a versatile capability to infantry or other armored formations.

#### Vintage Modularity: The Separate Tank Battalions of World War II

During the period between the World Wars, the concepts and means of armored warfare were still very much in infancy. The tank, first introduced in World War I as an infantry support weapon, developed slowly, both in terms of materiel and doctrine for employment. The U.S. Army experimented with various ideas in armored warfare

during the inter-war years. However, lean defense budgets and a focus on homeland defense forced the Army to proceed haltingly in development.<sup>7</sup>

This perspective quickly shifted with the advent of war in Europe. Observations of German successes with large-scale armored operations in Poland and France in 1939 and 1940 presented the Army with a realization of the potential for rapid, massed armored maneuver as a new form of warfare. Together with other preparations for war, these realizations provided a catalyst for the Army to develop a combined arms Armored Force. This coincided with equally rapid developments in design and production of a series of new tanks to outfit the emerging armored forces.<sup>8</sup>

Although initially neglected in the rush to field large armored formations, the traditional role of the tank as an infantry support weapon was not forgotten. At the insistence of infantry leaders, combined with insights gained from early observations in Europe, the War Department approved the formation of additional separate tank battalions within the Armored Force for the purpose of providing infantry support. However, in keeping with the prevailing thought that armor would often be used en masse rather than parceled out in supporting roles, the Army decided these new battalions would not be organic to the infantry divisions as senior infantry commanders desired. Rather, the battalions were pooled at corps or army level to be assigned as needed, whether in support of infantry, to reinforce an armored division, or employed for other specific missions.<sup>9</sup>

This decision was also in keeping with the Army General Headquarters (GHQ) favor towards modular formations for specialized units which could be pooled at levels above division, allowing such units to be flexibly tasked as required to meet specific

needs. In the GHQ construct, pooling allowed capabilities to be effectively dispersed to support small operations or rapidly assembled for large operations at decisive points. Thus, assets could be employed where most critically required or most fully exploitable. This approach also served to keep the organic division structures as lean and unencumbered as possible.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the tactical efficiencies envisioned, such principles also acknowledged the United States' limited national manpower, production capability, and, most importantly, overseas transport capacity. They also coincided with the general trend in the reorganization of the Army away from organic assignment of resources to large commands and more toward variable assignment tailored for specific missions with the aim of maximizing both flexibility and economy.<sup>11</sup>

To further support this view, the separate tank battalions were structured to make them identical to, and thus fully interchangeable with, the tank battalions of the new armored divisions.<sup>12</sup> In modern parlance, they would “plug and play” anywhere in the combat force. This enhanced their theoretical efficiency in meeting their dual purpose, as outlined in a post-war Army Ground Forces study: “...to give added striking strength to the infantry divisions, and for possible attachment to the armored divisions to provide added power for the striking echelon.”<sup>13</sup>

Tank battalion doctrine developed along with organization and equipment. The May 1941 version of the Army's capstone doctrinal manual, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Field Service Regulations, Operations*, provided a foundation and framework for Army combined arms operations. However, the concepts for integrating the new armored forces were rapidly evolving during the period. FM 17-10, *Armored Force Field Manual*,

*Tactics and Technique*, March 1942; FM 17-33, *The Armored Battalion, Light and Medium*, September 1942, and FM 17-32, *The Tank Company, Light and Medium*, August 1942, all provided early doctrine for armored force employment nested within the framework of FM 100-5. These publications, however, tended to be armor-centric, focused more on unit-internal operations and the use of rapid maneuver and massed armored operations rather than support to the infantry foot soldier, the primary mission of the separate tank battalions.<sup>14</sup>

It was not until sixteen months after the U.S. Army's entry into combat in the Mediterranean Theater that it published doctrine providing detailed discussions of the separate tank battalion's intended forte. FM 17-36, *Employment of Tanks with Infantry*, released in March 1944, was the first field manual to clearly describe the roles and expectations of tanks in operations supporting infantry. A supplement to FM 17-36, released in July 1944, relied heavily on combat lessons learned to provide a collection of example tactical problems and proposed solutions for the tank soldier and leader.<sup>15</sup>

Even with rudimentary doctrine, pre-deployment training for the separate tank battalions varied greatly across the force. Training generally focused on tank operations, gunnery, maintenance, and unit procedures. Combined arms training with infantry was uniformly spotty, especially prior to 1944, with many tank units never actually training with infantry before taking the field with them in combat.<sup>16</sup>

The net impact of these inconsistencies in doctrine and training was not only an initially diminished proficiency for the tankers in supporting their infantry brethren, but also shortfalls in infantry commanders' understanding of how to best employ the tank assets once provided to them.<sup>17</sup> As the Army became increasingly aware of the

insufficiencies, it escalated efforts to conduct effective combined arms training, both stateside and in theater.<sup>18</sup>

### The 753rd Tank Battalion's Experience

The 753rd Tank Battalion had ample opportunity to demonstrate the “modular” separate tank battalion concept. During its two-plus years in the Mediterranean and European Theaters of Operations, the battalion participated in six campaigns across Italy, France, and Germany, including three major combat landings from the sea. Over the course of its combat experience, the battalion, or subordinate elements thereof, supported two U.S. armies, six U.S. corps, two Allied corps, a remarkable sixteen different divisions (to include two Allied), and two U.S. armored groups.<sup>19</sup>

Although much of its employment occurred while attached to infantry divisions and often with subordinate companies detached in support of the regiments of those divisions, in a number of instances the battalion also participated in operations with special task forces or provisional headquarters. The battalion even occasionally received attachments to form combined arms task forces under its own command.<sup>20</sup>

Activated on June 1, 1941, at Fort Benning, Georgia,<sup>21</sup> the 753rd was part of a second major fielding of tank battalions within the Army.<sup>22</sup> The initial cadre of the battalion comprised 35 officers and 116 enlisted men transferred from other units on Fort Benning. Concurrent with activation, the battalion transferred to Camp Polk, Louisiana, and became assigned to the General Headquarters Reserve. Shortly after arrival at Camp Polk, the battalion received an additional 507 enlisted men from the Armored Force Replacement Training Center at Fort Knox, Kentucky, to fill out its ranks. Sparse and varied equipment, to include several varieties of tanks, supported the initial

training of the unit. It was not until late 1941 and early 1942 that the battalion began to receive current equipment, to include the M3 medium tank. The battalion's training in this early period appears to have centered almost exclusively on tank operations, its records offering no indication of combined arms training with infantry.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1942 the War Department ordered the battalion to Camp Hood, Texas, where it served for the next eight months as a supporting element and frequent exercise opposing force for the newly established Tank Destroyer Training and Firing Center. During this time, members of the battalion contributed to the development of tank and tank destroyer doctrine, as well as developing their own unit proficiencies. However, similar to Camp Polk, the battalion's training efforts at Camp Hood appear to have focused primarily on tank skills rather than operations with infantry.<sup>24</sup>

January 1943 saw the battalion's move to Camp Pickett, Virginia, and attachment to the 45th Infantry Division (ID), a unit with which it would eventually see combat. Upon closure at Camp Pickett, the battalion received the new M4A1 medium "Sherman" tank. During its two months at the camp, the battalion's activities centered on familiarization and training with the new tank with a particular focus on gunnery, as well as "a few small unit exercises" with the 45th ID.<sup>25</sup> The choice of words as they appear in the unit history, together with an absence of other references throughout the record, would seem to imply very little combined arms training took place with the division, or any other infantry unit, prior to overseas movement. Indeed, the personal reflections of one unit member were that he could not remember ever having trained with the infantry before the battalion's tankers were committed to combat with them as a team.<sup>26</sup>

In early April 1943, the battalion moved to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, for staging prior to overseas movement with the 45th ID. Loaded on five Landing Ship-Tank (LST) vessels for the Atlantic crossing, the battalion sailed on April 24.<sup>27</sup> After a ponderous 33-day transit in the slow moving LSTs, the battalion debarked in Algeria on May 26,<sup>28</sup> landing at several locations east of Oran before assembling near the Algerian port city of Arzew.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of the unit's arrival, Allied forces had been fighting in North Africa for several months since landing in Morocco and Algeria in the November 1942 Operation TORCH, and by late May the Allies had prevailed on the continent. Thus, the 753rd saw no combat in Northern Africa. The battalion's six weeks in Algeria were instead dedicated to maintenance, training, waterproofing of equipment, and preparations for a potential future amphibious landing. Unit records again evidence no indication of training or planning conducted with either infantry or other armored units during this time. On July 5 the battalion again loaded LSTs and was at sea by the 7th. Orders unsealed at that time revealed the battalion, attached to the 45th ID, would participate in the invasion of Sicily as a part of the II (US) Corps of the now-activated 7th (US) Army.<sup>30</sup>

## Sicily

Enduring rough seas and general confusion across the 45th ID landing zone, elements of the battalion came ashore on Sicily over the area operationally dubbed BLUE beach, in the vicinity of Santa Croce Camerina, southeast of Gela, on D-Day and D+1 (July 10 and 11 respectively).<sup>31</sup> Company C, initially attached to the 3d Battalion, 157th Infantry, became the first element of the battalion to see combat, landing at 1400 on July 10, and experiencing the battalion's first armor-on-armor engagement on the

morning of July 11 with the destruction of five Italian light tanks near the Comiso airport.<sup>32</sup> Company A also landed at BLUE beach at 0030 on July 11 followed by B Company and the battalion headquarters at 1230.<sup>33</sup>

Virtually from the moment it came ashore on Sicily, the battalion found itself executing rapid-fire changes of mission and attachment with its subordinate elements. At no point did the battalion fight as an entity. Rather, the battalion staff served primarily as an agent for coordinating and supporting the numerous parcelings of its force across the invasion front, often in response to sudden taskings or urgent calls for armor support. During the 39-day campaign, elements of the battalion supported not only the 157th, 179th, and 180th Infantry Regiments of the 45th ID as originally planned, but were also attached to or temporarily supported the 16th, 18th, and 26th Infantry Regiments of the 1st ID, the 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments of the 3rd ID, elements of the 82nd Airborne Division, and a 1st ID task force formed around the 70th Tank Battalion. Battalion elements also occasionally operated under direct control of II (US) Corps.<sup>34</sup>

Contending with the frequent changes of mission and task organization, elements of the battalion fought alongside the supported units as they progressed from the beachhead, advancing northward across the island and eventually reaching the northern coast to turn east toward Messina. 753rd tankers led or made exceptional contributions to a number of key engagements. Among these were C Company's seizure of Comiso and its airport with the 157th Infantry on D-Day and B Company's reinforcement to a hastily-assembled force of 82nd Airborne soldiers in their attack against defending enemy in the vicinity of Vittoria on Jul 11. This B Company action



was followed by its repulse of a strong enemy counterattack later that same day. Supporting the 180th Infantry, B Company also found itself involved in intense fighting to seize and, after being pushed back by a fierce enemy counterattack, re-seize the town and airport of Biscari, July 11-13. A Company's support contributed to the 179th Infantry's successful attack on Caltagirone and the stemming of an enemy armored counterattack that followed, July 13-16. A Company later teamed with the 70th Tank Battalion and the 16th, 18th, and 26th Infantry Regiments of the 1st ID in a fight to secure the vital crossroads area of Enna, followed by an advance north and eastward, encountering stiff enemy resistance in the vicinities of Alimena, Bompietro, and Petralia, July 16-22.<sup>35</sup>

On the morning of July 23, C Company undertook a tasking to seize the town and high ground at Campofelice on the northern shore in support of, and several miles ahead of, the advancing infantry of the 157th Regiment. Beyond enabling the infantry's movement, the successful C Company attack resulted in the elimination of enemy defenses on that key terrain with an unknown number of enemy killed (primarily Italian), over 150 enemy prisoners taken, and the destruction of a large amount of stockpiled enemy munitions in the locale. With the American infantry failing to reach the area by nightfall, the C Company tanks held the ground until relieved the next day.<sup>36</sup>

Particularly noteworthy during the campaign was the participation of a tank platoon from the battalion in each of two "end run" amphibious operations executed along the northern shore by battalion task forces of the 3rd ID, at Sant' Agata on August 8 and Brolo on August 11 respectively. Each operation endeavored to land a force behind the withdrawing enemy to disrupt and cut-off its forces as the U.S. divisions pressed

eastward along the northern coast toward Messina. Both events contributed to the American advance, although the Brolo operation resulted in a harrowing and costly, although ultimately successful, battle for which all the units comprising the battalion landing team, to include the 753rd platoon of B Company, received the Presidential Unit Citation.<sup>37</sup> Two platoons of C Company were to have joined the Regimental Combat Team of the 157th Infantry in a third amphibious landing, planned to go ashore east of Milazzo. Put to sea on 15 August, this force eventually landed unopposed on friendly beaches west of Milazzo since 3rd ID troops, advancing along the coastline on shore, had already progressed past the planned landing site.<sup>38</sup>

As the Allied campaign for Sicily neared successful conclusion, on August 16 the 3rd Platoon of B Company, attached to the 2/7th Infantry, supported the 3rd ID attack into Messina. The platoon's elimination of nine enemy combat pieces, to include two 88-mm guns, forced the enemy to abandon 32 other vehicles and flee, enabling the 7th Infantry to be the first Allied element to march into the crucial port city at the island's extreme northeastern tip, a scant two sea-miles from the Italian mainland.<sup>39</sup>

Other than the first few days of operations in the coastal lowland areas near Gela, throughout the campaign the tankers found Sicily's mountainous terrain often unfavorable for armor employment, frequently confining them to established roads. Thus restricted, the flexibility of the tanks was often diminished and they were most frequently employed as a means of attacking stationary enemy emplacements or as a source of direct and indirect supporting fires. Where more open terrain permitted the tanks to maneuver, they proved highly effective in supporting the infantry operations

and were particularly useful where the U.S. forces encountered strong enemy opposition, machine gun emplacements, or armored forces.<sup>40</sup>

Pressing the tanks in continuous operations took a toll mechanically, as accentuated in the C Company report of July 23, "...tanks are beginning to break down continuously for lack of 50 and 100 hour checks."<sup>41</sup> The battalion report also reflects the maintenance challenges levied by the strain placed on tank engines running the mountainous terrain, as well as slogging through wet sand at the beachheads.<sup>42</sup>

Elements of the battalion were nevertheless effective in providing armor support throughout the 6-week campaign in Sicily, directly resulting in an estimated 250 enemy killed, 1100 enemy prisoners, and destruction of over 100 enemy vehicles, to include 28 tanks. These contributions came at a cost of six battalion members killed in action with an additional three killed in accidents, a total of twenty-two members wounded, five lost to capture, and six tanks and one half-track destroyed.<sup>43</sup> But the battalion had met its first combat, had drawn blood and been bloodied, and gained much hard-won experience and wisdom, both internal to its operation and as members of a combined arms team. Unfortunately, few mechanisms or opportunities existed for the battalion to share its lessons with the many other separate tank battalions that would follow it into battle over the coming months.

## Salerno

As Allied plans quickly developed to take the fight to the Italian mainland, the 753rd's C Company received the call to support the initial 5th (US) Army invasion at Salerno, attached to the 179th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT) of the 45th ID, VI (US) Corps. (The remainder of the battalion would go ashore on D+6 with follow-on

elements of the 45th ID).<sup>44</sup> Having fought throughout the Sicily campaign as separate elements but for the most part geographically able to exercise centralized control and support, the battalion now had to tailor and detach a company-size force package to fight fully on its own, separated from its parent headquarters by 150 miles of Tyrrhenian sea. On September 6, 1943, C Company, reinforced with a section each of the battalion's mortars and assault guns as well as a third of the battalion's medics and maintenance, departed the battalion laager in northern Sicily to load with the 179th RCT near Termini Imerese. By the afternoon of September 8, the force was steaming toward the Italian mainland.<sup>45</sup>

Initially designated a floating reserve for the 5th (US) Army force, the 179th RCT came ashore on D+1 (September 10) to reinforce the 36th ID.<sup>46</sup> C Company crossed the beaches with the RCT in the vicinity of Paestum that morning, assembled, and prepared for combat.<sup>47</sup> The 179th RCT was ordered to advance northeast on the left flank of the 36th ID to secure high ground and block the corridor formed between the Sele and Calore Rivers, which formed a potentially dangerous seam in the Allied inland push.<sup>48</sup>

The 179th RCT commander decided to divide his attack, with two battalions attacking to the high ground and one battalion advancing south of the Calore, protecting the regiment's right flank.<sup>49</sup> Correspondingly, the 753rd C Company commander assigned 1st Platoon to support the advance of the flank battalion, with the remainder of the company to remain with the regimental main body.<sup>50</sup> Over the next three days C Company would find themselves immersed in some of the heaviest fighting of the campaign. Their contributions would be instrumental in blunting a fierce series of

German counterattacks that threatened to divide the Allied force and defeat the entire Salerno invasion.<sup>51</sup>

Moving with the RCT in the early morning hours of September 11, the company-minus crossed the Calore River over an engineer-prepared ford. As the column proceeded northwest, the leading infantry engaged enemy forces in the vicinity of Persano, eventually by-passing the town. At approximately 0600 a ferocious combination of enemy artillery, mortar, anti-tank, and small arms fire separated the regimental column, destroying vehicles and preventing further movement of those elements still south and west of Persano. The regiment's infantry was effectively cut off from its support, to include the tanks of C Company.<sup>52</sup>

The C Company commander collaborated with the commander of the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, also now separated from the infantry. Unable to advance and surmising the perilous situation of the forward infantry, they determined to consolidate their forces in the vicinity of the Calore River crossing site. Together with an artillery battery also in the area, they set a defense to secure the ford from German forces that appeared bent on seizing it, which would have resulted in the enemy's complete encirclement and isolation of the forward infantry elements. Late morning, with the enemy fires seeming to subside, the commanders at the ford endeavored to launch a combined tank-tank destroyer attack to push through and link up with the infantry. Determined enemy repulsed this effort at a cost of one tank and seven destroyers.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the afternoon, a platoon of C Company tanks ranged the woods south of Persano, attempting to clean out enemy infantry and machinegun emplacements. As evening neared, the company commander directed the 3rd Platoon to attempt contact

with the infantry by picking a route along the north bank of the Calore. Upon the platoon's failure to find a crossing over an irrigation ditch that ran east to west below Persano, the commander ordered the platoon back to the company. A pre-dawn reconnaissance found a suitable crossing, and the company made plans for a morning link-up attempt.<sup>54</sup>

At 0700 September 12, the C Company tankers moved out along the route hugging the Calore north bank, successfully making contact with the infantry main body by 0800. The company-minus quickly became attached to 1/179th Infantry for an attack into Persano intended to eliminate enemy from the town. Upon entering the town, however, they found no opposition, the Germans having withdrawn. The tanks moved through the town and established positions to support the infantry occupation.<sup>55</sup>

That night, the next day, and into the early hours of September 14, the tankers joined with the RCT in conducting a series of defensive repositionings to block strong German counterattacks and strengthen the corps left flank. Daybreak on the 14th found the tanks arrayed in camouflaged firing positions together with infantry, tank destroyers, and other supporting assets of the RCT.<sup>56</sup> At 0800, the Germans launched a major southeasterly thrust consisting of an infantry battalion supported by eight Mark IV tanks, an effort that threatened to split the Allied lines. But the enemy's line of march paralleled the 179th RCT positions at a range of 600-1000 yards, enabling the C Company tankers, together with other elements of the RCT, to launch a fusillade against the German formation's flank, destroying seven tanks and disabling the eighth, as the company diary relates, "...in not more than five minutes." The contest with the

remainder of this enemy force continued for the next hour and a half, the tankers supporting the regiment with high explosive tank rounds and machinegun fire.<sup>57</sup>

Over the following days, encounters with enemy forces would diminish. German efforts to repel the Allied invasion at Salerno had failed, and 5th (US) Army had gained a lodgment on the mainland. This, however, had come at a cost to C Company of five dead, another five wounded, and three disabled tanks. On September 19, C Company rejoined the 753rd Tank Battalion main body, now assembled ashore near Paestum, relieved of its attachment to the 45th ID and placed in VI (US) Corps reserve.<sup>58</sup>

#### San Pietro

Two days after C Company reunited with the battalion, the 753rd was attached to the 36th ID. This began a frequent partnership with this infantry division that would continue throughout the remainder of the war.<sup>59</sup> Over the next several weeks, as 5th (US) Army consolidated its forces and began to push northward, the battalion underwent refit and maintenance, assimilated replacements, and conducted training. Having learned the imperative of combined arms proficiencies and partnership, the battalion's activities included unit training with elements of the 36th ID, forging tank-infantry teamwork between the members of these two combat-experienced organizations in preparation for operations to come.<sup>60</sup> The combined training efforts continued after the battalion accompanied the division in its move north to assembly areas near Capua in early November, with individual companies of the battalion often training in "tank-infantry field problems" with the subordinate infantry regiments of the division.<sup>61</sup>

On November 17, the 36th ID and attached elements began to relieve the 3rd ID in positions in the Mignano Gap.<sup>62</sup> Centered on the town of Mignano, the terrain in this area formed a narrow corridor through the rugged mountains, providing a constricted entrance to the Liri Valley, the long plain that stretched northwest to the ultimate Allied objective of Rome.<sup>63</sup>

Northwest of Mignano against the base of Monte Summacro lay the centuries-old village of San Pietro, a strongpoint in the heavily fortified German defensive line stretching across the narrow opening of the valley. In December, the 36th ID would undertake a series of savage battles to break this line and win control of the town and surrounding high ground to open the door to the Liri Valley for the 5th (US) Army advance on Rome.<sup>64</sup> As part of these efforts, on December 12, the division ordered the 753rd to prepare for an attack to seize the enemy stronghold of San Pietro in conjunction with the 143rd Infantry Regiment, after a previous costly attempt by that regiment had fallen short of winning the town several days prior.<sup>65</sup>

But the terrain in the vicinity was far from suitable for tank employment. Numerous stream beds and gullies crossed the area. The ground was soft from recent heavy rains. The Monte Summacro slopes above the village were steep and cut with terraces, covered with olive trees and scrub. The stone retaining walls of these terraces varied in height from three to seven feet. The steps of the terraces were broken by stream beds, gullies, and “accidents of terrain” which promised to severely impede tank movement, and the trees on the slopes limited visibility.<sup>66</sup>

From the American lines, a single road led into the village. Steep and winding with a terrace wall on its right side and a steep drop off to its left, the road crossed over



several vulnerable bridges and culverts as it wound around the base of Monte Summacro and into the town. From the road, a number of cart and donkey trails branched onto the terraces, only one of which appeared remotely feasible for traverse by tank. Upon studying this difficult terrain, the battalion staff determined that cross-country movement of tanks in support of the infantry attack was simply not possible. The only potential means of deploying tanks into the village was by way of the road. The battalion recommended to the division commanding general that, if tanks were to be used, they attack down the road and the one suitable trail into San Pietro.<sup>67</sup>

Unconvinced, the commanding general directed that the battalion use engineer support to maneuver tanks onto the terraced slopes above San Pietro to support the infantry attack. But determined efforts with the engineers to gain mobility for the tanks by breaking down terrace walls and building trails met with frustration. The first tank to attempt to negotiate the improvised passage bogged down and threw its track, and the entire enterprise eventually drew German artillery fire.<sup>68</sup>

Upon the battalion's report of this failure to the commanding general, the decision defaulted for the tanks to attack into San Pietro by way of the road and trail, as previously suggested.<sup>69</sup> A Company would lead the attack into the village for the 143rd RCT, proceeding in a single column down the road, and then splitting at the juncture with the trail to attempt approach on the town from two directions. B Company would provide supporting fires from below the village,<sup>70</sup> while C Company would remain in assembly areas further to the rear, prepared to assault up the valley to take positions west of San Pietro and provide supporting fires.<sup>71</sup>

Even moving by way of the road, deep concerns remained within the battalion: the tankers would be dangerously exposed on the approach, and mines or blown bridges could prevent the tanks from reaching their objective. Consultation with the division staff yielded no remedy for the threat of mines, but to provide some insurance against lost bridges, the division requested two British Valentine treadway tanks, specially designed to lay a mechanical bridge across short gaps, to support the A Company attack.<sup>72</sup>

Following an intense barrage of preparatory artillery fires, the combined infantry-tank attack on San Pietro began at 1200 on December 15. A Company crossed the line of departure with seventeen tanks, including one British Valentine, and made its way down the narrow, winding road toward the town. The lead tank of the column reached the juncture with the trail and, as planned, turned right to proceed up that path to find a position of overwatch. It quickly found the trail impassable. At the direction of the company commander, this tank maneuvered off the trail to pick its way toward the town across the terraces. Slowly and laboriously doing so, it eventually engaged several enemy emplacements on the edge of the village.<sup>73</sup>

As the remainder of the column proceeded down the main road toward the town, the now-leading tank soon struck one of the feared, inevitable mines, disabling the tank in the road. Three tanks that followed maneuvered around the mine-damaged tank and continued down the road, but within a short distance antitank fire struck all three in rapid succession, causing each to burst into flames. Surviving crew members able to escape the burning vehicles tried desperately to aide their injured colleagues and those trapped

in the flaming tanks before scattering on foot for cover or the protection of the friendly infantry lines.<sup>74</sup>

The column, now crippled and fully exposed, began to suffer under German artillery and mortar fire. The next two tanks in the line attempted to press forward, but each struck mines and became immobilized. The tank immediately behind them tried to push one of the crippled tanks off the road in order to permit its passage, only to hit a mine and become disabled itself. The next tank, after attempting unsuccessfully to push aside two tanks now blocking the road, tried to maneuver out of the road by climbing the terrace to its right, but was unable to scale the stone retaining wall. At the commander's direction, a platoon leader further back in the column made several vain attempts to climb his tank over the terrace as well, eventually rolling the tank on its side and blocking the road. The tank behind his, also attempting to ascend the terrace wall, threw track. On the company commander's eventual order for the remaining tanks to turn around, another tank backed too far, slipped off the embankment to the left, and fell five feet, rolling to land on its side. Two tanks in the rear of the column, attempting to find an alternate route over the terraces, threw their tracks.<sup>75</sup>

As nightfall approached, the battalion ordered the tanks to withdraw. Ultimately, of seventeen tanks that crossed the line of departure at the start of the attack, only four returned to the assembly area that evening, carrying with them many of the surviving crew members of the disabled and destroyed tanks, as well as those left blocked in by the chaos on the road.<sup>76</sup>

The December 15 tank assault on San Pietro had failed, as had the infantry attack it was intended to support. Two days after the battle, in his journal entry of December

17, Major General Fred L. Walker, then 36th ID Commanding General, would record that he had been reluctant to use the tanks due to the unsuitable terrain but had been pressed into it by the 5th (US) Army G-3, purportedly speaking for the 5th (US) Army Commanding General.<sup>77</sup> Walker would echo this position in an interview years later.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the 753rd battalion reports and message logs at the time reflect a strong insistence, generally attributed to Walker, to get the tanks into the fight, regardless of all challenges in doing so.<sup>79</sup>

For the 753rd, the attempt to force the use of its tanks in an imprudent mission over unsuitable terrain had resulted in not only failure, but great cost. Though the majority of the damaged tanks would later be recovered and repaired, and the seven tanks destroyed were eventually replaceable, far less so were the seven experienced leaders and crewmen killed in the ill-conceived action and the several others left wounded.<sup>80</sup>

#### Monte Porchia

On December 28, II (US) Corps detached the battalion from 36th ID and directed it to join Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division (AD). On December 30, the battalion formed with Task Force Allen,<sup>81</sup> a special II (US) Corps task force led by Brigadier General Frank Allen, Jr, commander of Combat Command B. This force, which would operate under the direct control of the corps headquarters, was built around the 1st AD's 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, and reinforced with the 753rd as well as the 760th and 757th Tank Battalions, the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 1008th Engineer Combat Group, and elements of 1st AD Division Artillery and other division troops.<sup>82</sup> The task force's mission would be to capture Monte Porchia, a steep

and rocky hill mass about 900 feet high and almost a mile in length, which lay in the center of the valley barely three miles west of San Pietro along Highway 6. German forces entrenched on this high ground and two lower rises to its front possessed a dominating vantage from which to direct artillery and enfilading fires upon Allied forces advancing up the valley along Highway 6.<sup>83</sup>

Over the next several days the 753rd melded with this new organization. Its battalion reports and message logs indicate a flurry of instructions from Combat Command B turned Task Force Allen, as well as demands for a number of reports and the assignment of liaison officers. However, the documentation from the planning that took place during this period reveals a far greater sophistication in the employment of tanks than had been evidenced in earlier operations with the 45th ID and 36th ID. This perhaps stemmed from the mechanized character of the 1st AD from which the task force originated, and that organization's experience in armored combat in North Africa and earlier battles in Italy. Compared to the 753rd's previous operations with the infantry divisions, the tasks assigned to it by Task Force Allen seem more cognizant of the capabilities of tanks as well as their limitations in the rough mountainous terrain and the broken, soft, and rain-sodden flatlands below. The plans also imply a more thorough understanding of the emerging doctrine for combined tank-infantry-engineer operations.<sup>84</sup>

Thorough reconnaissance and analysis resulted in two well-developed task force plans, Plan Resolution as the base and an alternate Plan Chaffee, to be effective upon order of the task force commander should the initial attack bog down. Although neither of these plans would be executed exactly as written, the groundwork they entailed

would ultimately contribute to a very effective use of the battalion in the action to come.<sup>85</sup>

To take advantage of darkness in crossing the exposed lowland approach to Monte Porchia, Task Force Allen launched its attack shortly after nightfall on January 4. The 753rd , initially supporting the 1/6th Armored Infantry, moved on the north flank of the task force, astride Highway 6. The tanks bounded forward to designated positions, often prepared in advance by engineers, to provide supporting fires as the infantry assault progressed.<sup>86</sup>

Over the next three days, the task force met fierce resistance from the well prepared enemy defenders on the mountain and in areas below, suffering intense volumes of deadly artillery, mortar, and direct fire as its elements negotiated areas laden with mines and obstacles along the approach. Hard-won gains faced violent enemy counterattacks, occasionally forcing the U.S. forces to yield.<sup>87</sup> The 753rd tankers maneuvered to support the infantry, eliminating enemy gun emplacements, reducing strong points, and providing supporting fires.<sup>88</sup> Casualties were high across the task force, particularly among the infantry and the engineers, with 139 killed and over 400 wounded through the battle's course.<sup>89</sup> The 753rd lost two tanks to anti-tank fire; two others were disabled by artillery and another by a mine. Four battalion soldiers were killed and a dozen more wounded.<sup>90</sup> But by the morning of January 7, the task force had gained the summit of Monte Porchia and thrown the enemy from the mountain. One last enemy attempt at counterattack in the early morning hours of January 8 ended in failure. The task force objective was secure, and a further step had been taken up the Liri Valley and along the road to Rome.<sup>91</sup>

## Cassino

Subsequent to the Monte Porchia operation, on January 12 the battalion was again attached to the 36th ID, this time to prepare for operations to gain a bridgehead across the Rapido River. A narrow but deep tributary that cut north to south across the valley floor, the river flowed near the town of Cassino and below the dominating mountain of the same name which was crowned with an ancient, fortress-like monastery. For reasons unclear in the records, however, the battalion detached from the 36th ID on January 16, prior to what would be that division's bloody and ill-fated attempt to make the Rapido crossing beginning on January 20, an attack that would result in failure and the decimation of the division.<sup>92</sup>

Attached to the 1st Tank Group, in an unusual move the 753rd was organized as its own combined arms force, complete with an attached infantry battalion, a reconnaissance troop, a tank destroyer company, and an engineer company. Thus augmented, the 753rd battalion task force participated in planning for operations intended to exploit a breakthrough at the Rapido, once gained by the infantry. Although this would have been one of the few times the battalion would operate under the tactical direction of a tank group headquarters, it was not to be as the hoped-for conditions did not materialize.<sup>93</sup>

On February 12, the battalion experienced its first direct involvement in multinational warfare with its placement under the operational control of the New Zealand Corps. Comprised of the 2nd New Zealand Division and the 4th Indian Division, this Allied formation moved into the valley to relieve the preponderance of American forces in the Cassino area. Furthering its multinational experience, on

February 13 the 753rd actually received in attachment a New Zealand infantry battalion, a relationship that would exist for the next five weeks.<sup>94</sup>

Although limited in opportunities for training, the American tankers and New Zealander infantrymen devoted significant effort to melding their capabilities: educating one another on respective employment, conducting rehearsals, and building teamwork in preparation for their anticipated combined operations.<sup>95</sup> Together with other U.S. units also attached to the battalion (specifically two tank destroyer companies, an engineer company, and a reconnaissance troop), the 753rd built on its past experiences to create a partnership with these new elements. The intended mission of the 753rd battalion task force was to seize creek crossings beyond the Rapido River and Cassino once the New Zealand Corps had secured a bridgehead and the town, this in order to facilitate an armored exploitation up the Liri Valley.<sup>96</sup>

Unfortunately, Allied efforts to break the enemy line at Cassino continued to meet with failure, and the battalion's combined arms, multinational combat team would have only minimal opportunity to work together under fire. After a massive Allied bombing of the town of Cassino on March 15, elements of the New Zealand Division finally gained entry into the ruined town, only to find resilient German forces still entrenched. The failed construction of a Bailey Bridge which was to support the tankers crossing of the Rapido and entry into Cassino frustrated the battalion team's employment, as did reports that the streets of the rubble city and Highway 6 were impassable due to debris and bomb craters. On March 20 the New Zealanders were detached from the battalion, and on March 25 1st Tank Group, now titled 1st Armored Group, directed the 753rd to



withdraw to a rear assembly area for reorganization under a new table of organization and equipment.<sup>97</sup>

### The Push to Rome, and Beyond

Pulled well off the line to the vicinity of Naples, the battalion spent the first two weeks of April engaged in reorganization to a new structure which added a "D" Company of M3 light tanks, replaced the older, light-tank based guns of its assault platoon with M7 105-millimeter self-propelled howitzers, and provided an expanded battalion staff in addition to several other improved capabilities. This new structure, a result of combat experience and the introduction of new technology, was intended to provide the separate tank battalions greater operational capability and flexibility. The enhanced battalion team spent the majority of April integrating new members and training with the new equipment and organizational structure. For much of the period the battalion remained attached to the 36th ID in a non-tactical setting. C Company answered a division tasking to provide a company to train with the 2nd Moroccan Division of the French Expeditionary Corps for a period of about 10 days.<sup>98</sup>

Battalion records for the months of May and June of 1944 are lost from the archives. However, the unit history reflects the newly-reorganized battalion's participation in operations in the new 5th (US) Army zone, between the Liri Valley and the coast, in the final press towards Rome. Attached for a period to the 88th ID of the II (US) Corps in that division's efforts to break the German Gustav defensive line, by mid-May the battalion came under the control of the French Expeditionary Corps. Working with both the 2nd Moroccan Division and 3rd Algerian Division in the advance

northward, the battalion's efforts with the French corps in the capture of Ausonia, Esperia, Pico, and Utri won for it the French Croix de Guerre with Vermillion Star.<sup>99</sup>

In late May, 5th (US) Army relieved the battalion from the French corps and directed its link up with the VI (US) Corps upon that force's break out from its beleaguered beachhead at Anzio. Once with VI (US) Corps, the 753rd was again attached to the 36th ID in the pursuit of withdrawing German forces, through Rome and beyond.<sup>100</sup>

The 753rd Tank Battalion's 350-day combat tenure in Italy came to a close with orders on June 24, 1944, to prepare for rearward movement to the vicinity of Salerno.<sup>101</sup> Since crossing the beaches of Sicily the 753rd had matured from a new and untried organization to one of the most experienced and battle-hardened tank battalions in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. Its journey across Sicily and up the Italian peninsula had exacted a toll of over 40 members killed in action and dozens more wounded or missing. But its contributions to the Allied efforts had been important; it had experienced both success and failure in its employment as a flexible, modular force in several Allied formations.

## France

The retrograde to Salerno brought only brief respite to the battalion. After a short interlude of refit and reorganization, to include training on 16 new duplex-drive amphibious tanks, by mid-August the battalion launched for yet another combat landing, this time in Southern France as part of VI (US) Corps and the 7th (US) Army in Operation DRAGOON. Coming ashore over the Riviera shingle with the 36th ID on August 15, the 753rd assisted in the rapid reduction of largely ineffectual enemy

defenses along the coast and around the town of St. Raphael. Within 24 hours after landfall, the battalion received orders that incorporated it into what would be one of the Allies' most impressive armored exploitations of the war.<sup>102</sup>

Task Force Butler, an ad hoc, provisional armored group assembled on August 17 under the command of Brigadier General Frederic Butler, VI (US) Corps Deputy Commander, had as its mission to break north from the beachhead to cut off retreating German forces. Travelling 235 miles in 10 days, capturing key terrain along the enemy line of withdrawal, severely mauling enemy forces and nearly cutting off the retreat of the German Nineteenth Army, this brigade-sized force made immense contributions to the rapid Allied advance from the new southern front. The 753rd provided a major share of the armored firepower of Task Force Butler and played a crucial role in its operations. Over the course of the operation, the 753rd battalion commander and operations officer each commanded separate, independently-maneuvering combined arms teams within the fast-moving operation. The battalion's actions proved essential to Task Force Butler's success, inflicting heavy casualties on retreating German forces and destroying large amounts of enemy materiel, particularly in the vicinities of villages of Montelimar, Gap, and Lorient.<sup>103</sup>

But the swift northward pursuit from the Riviera beachhead gave way to tough autumn and winter slogging against stiffening enemy in the difficult terrain of the Vosges Mountains. Attached to its now familiar partner, the 36th ID, in addition to battling enemy forces the battalion also struggled with maintenance challenges within its worn and hard-worked tank fleet. By October, the unit also found itself beset with personnel shortages, having lost 16 tank commanders and 17 drivers since landing in France,

while priorities for replacements remained directed toward the infantry and units advancing inland from the Normandy beachhead further north. The command attempted to mitigate its thinning ranks through internal redistribution and cross-training while struggling to keep as many tanks operational as possible. The battalion also contended with occasional misunderstandings on the part of its supported infantry commanders whose constant demands for armored support on the line often did not reflect an appreciation of the overhead involved in maintaining an effective tank force.<sup>104</sup>

During this period the battalion would again be called upon to form a mobile, combined arms task force, dubbed Force Felber for the 753rd battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Felber, and used by the 36th ID commander for a number of crucial missions. The battalion also fought alongside the Japanese-American 442nd RCT, now also attached to the 36th ID, in intense and brutal battles around the town of Bruyeres, France. This included support to the costly, but ultimately successful efforts of that RCT in late October to relieve a beleaguered force of the 1/141st Infantry, cut off and under fierce siege by the enemy on a hilltop in the low Vosges, a group that would come to be dubbed the “Lost Battalion” of the 36th ID. Also, for a 2-week period in mid-November, A Company, reinforced with a platoon of D Company, detached to support the newly-arrived 100th ID while the battalion-minus continued operations with the 36th ID.<sup>105</sup>

In late December 1944, the battalion’s companies were parceled out to support three separate task forces, each comprised of elements of a different, recently-arrived and untested infantry division and commanded by its respective Assistant Division Commander. With its elements deployed along a 25-mile front in the vicinity of

Strasbourg, France, supporting Task Force Harris (63rd ID), Task Force Linden (42nd ID), and Task Force Herren (70th ID), the 753rd was instrumental in blunting one of the last enemy offensives of the war. Operation NORDWIND, a desperate German push meant to destroy Allied forces in the Alsace, occurred on the immediate heels of the Battle of the Bulge further north in the Ardennes. Unsuccessful, the German offensive expended the enemy's last reserves, leaving little to slow the Allied advance into Germany.<sup>106</sup>

#### Across Southern Germany: The Final Months

Again attached to the 36th ID, the battalion fought north along the Rhine plain through the frigid weather of January and February 1945, and continued with the 36th ID in their March assault and breach of the Siegfried Line. Released from the 36th ID on March 31, the battalion crossed the Rhine River at Mannheim, Germany, under VI (US) Corps control and joined with the 63rd ID in the pursuit of German forces withdrawing across the front. During April, as the Allied pace quickened, the battalion would move over two hundred miles into the heartland of Southern Germany.<sup>107</sup>

But as it advanced, the battalion continued to encounter pockets of fierce enemy resistance. C Company in particular experienced some of its most intense combat of the war in early April while attached to the 253rd Infantry Regiment, 63rd ID, in operations along the Jagst River north of Heilbronn, Germany. Teamed with the 253rd, the tankers would be credited with breaking a determined defense by the 17th SS Panzer Division, at the cost of multiple late-war casualties for C Company, only a month prior to Germany's ultimate capitulation. Despite this costly success (or perhaps because of it) the record alludes to a difficult relationship between C Company and the 253rd,

ultimately resulting C Company's relief from support to that regiment after a request on their behalf from the 753rd Battalion Commander to the 63rd ID Commanding General.<sup>108</sup>

Fittingly, the last days of the war found the battalion once again teamed with the 36th ID, gaining its final attachment to the division on April 28, a day after crossing the Danube River. Marching forward with the 36th ID, reducing scattered and increasingly feeble enemy efforts at defense, the battalion proceeded generally southeast, through the Augsburg area and Bad Tolz, bypassing Munich en route. At the close of hostilities on May 7, 1945, the battalion crossed into Austria and mustered near Kufstein, in the northern shadow of the Tyrolean Alps. By May 10, with all companies returned to battalion control, the 753rd Tank Battalion was assembled in its entirety for the first time since August of the previous year. Since landing in Southern France, the battalion had undergone over 260 days of combat, with one or more of its elements almost continuously in the line.<sup>109</sup>

### Lessons in Modularity

The 753rd Tank Battalion's two years in combat during World War II, supporting multiple organizations in diverse operations, tested the flexibility and adaptability of its leaders and soldiers under the most extreme and protracted of circumstances. What insights for the U.S. Army's emerging modular forces might be drawn from the experience of this organization, a unit specifically designed and utilized in combat to provide a modular, "plug and play," specialized capability?

What follows are a number of observations, most, if not all of which may seem familiar and well-understood. But contemporary literature and "lessons learned"

emerging from recent operations are rife with examples of challenges experienced by current-day Army units, many of which are reflective of those experienced by the 753rd.

## Leadership

As it has been since time immemorial, leadership remains the essential element.

Colonel (Retired) Charles McNeill, the 753rd Battalion Commander at war's end and author of the existing unit history, reflects:

The general practice in Europe during World War II was that a separate tank battalion be attached to each infantry division which, in turn, would attach a company to each of its regiments, which then usually attached a tank platoon to each of its battalions. This practice imposed most difficult leadership problems on battalion and company commanders, who had command responsibility but little tactical authority. That the 753rd Tank Battalion was able to establish its outstanding combat record must be credited to the "esprit" created by its leaders at all levels, from tank commander to battalion commander.<sup>110</sup>

Proficient, adaptable, and resolute leadership at every level was instrumental to the battlefield successes of the 753rd, as well as the battalion's ability to overcome hardship and failure during its arduous two years in combat. The battalion record, when viewed in entirety from the invasion of Sicily through the war's end, clearly tells the story of a unit and leaders that grew and learned as the war and their experience progressed. The leaders knew their equipment and their soldiers. More importantly, they learned how best to use both, while providing sound advice to the commanders of the units to which they were attached.

The latest revision of the US Army's training doctrine, FM 7-0, *Training the Force*, describes seven tenets for developing adaptive leaders for the modular Army which seem reflective of many of the demands placed on the leaders of the 753rd. These include:

- Train leaders in the art and science of battle command
- Train leaders who can execute mission command
- Develop multi-skilled leaders
- Educate leaders to think
- Train leaders and organizations to adapt to changing mission roles and responsibilities
- Create a “freedom to learn” environment
- Provide subordinates with feedback<sup>111</sup>

Development for modular Army leaders must prepare them for the demands of full-spectrum warfare and adaptability in operations. Not only must they be proficient in applying the capabilities of their own unit, they must be skilled in rapidly and effectively integrating their unit into often unfamiliar teams. This implies an ability to provide leadership not only internally, but also externally as they meld their unit into a tailored force.

Leaders of units, particularly specialized units who might expect to be integrated into force tailored teams, must be prepared to inform senior leaders unfamiliar with their units how best to employ them. They must ardently advocate for their unit to ensure the proper utilization of its capabilities as well as understanding of its limitations. Leaders must also be adept at conveying their unit’s special support requirements to gaining leadership to ensure their capabilities are adequately sustained and preserved.

Likewise, leaders of higher-level organizations must be prepared to receive and integrate capabilities of modular units into their formations. They must understand as broadly as possible the doctrine for employment of specialized units, be prepared to embrace them into their organizations, and be open to the recommendations and requirements of those units’ leaders who serve as the functional experts for their employment. Team building, as manifested in the rapid assemblage of modular unit



blocks into cohesive and effective teams, must be understood as a vital skill for leaders in the modular Army.

## Doctrine

Mature, understood, and practiced doctrine provides a foundation and common language for the effective integration and utilization of units into force tailored teams. The dearth of commonly understood doctrine for separate tank battalion employment contributed to challenges experienced by the 753rd tankers, sometimes leading to tragic results. This was particularly evident in early operations with infantry divisions in which the lack of universally-understood, combined tank-infantry doctrine led to occasional misunderstanding and improper employment of the battalion's capabilities, as well as failures to appreciate its limitations. A post war study by the U.S. Army Armored Center assessed that while the doctrine for employment of the armored divisions was generally well understood and capably executed, the employment of separate tank battalions was "...not so well understood nor were they used in the most efficient manner."<sup>112</sup> In the antithesis, where the battalion was employed in a manner in which its capabilities were maximized, it was generally able to achieve strong results. Illustrative examples include the operations at Monte Porchia, Italy, with Task Force Allen and in Southern France with Task Force Butler.

Beyond understanding specific unit capabilities, doctrine for the modular Army must provide practical guidelines for rapidly and effectively integrating all types of units into tailored teams. Effective team building between units assembled into tailored teams cannot be assumed, particularly when these teamings take place under hasty and stressful conditions. Each modular unit may bring capabilities to the team, but such

capabilities cannot be maximized or adequately supported without building mutual understanding. Responsibilities for developing these relationships lie with leaders. However, the more a unit uses established procedures to prepare itself to receive or be received by other units in building a force tailored team, the more quickly and effectively this can be achieved. Doctrinal methodology for the rapid and effective tailoring of forces should be central and foundational for the modular Army.

Modern operations are increasingly joint and multinational in character. As such, modular units, especially those that bring specialized capabilities, must be prepared to integrate with sister service or multinational partners in their operations, perhaps on short notice. The 753rd experienced this in its provision of armored support to the New Zealand forces at Cassino, and to the Moroccan and Algerian Divisions of the French Expeditionary Corps in the press toward Rome. Doctrine, both Army-specific and, to the extent possible, common with our Allies and joint partners, should provide guidelines for the effective integration into, and integration of, sister service and multinational units.

Allusions abound throughout the 753rd record of the battalion's adapting to the unique procedures and personalities of the units with which it was partnered. Then as now, the nuts and bolts of how a unit does business were often detailed in local, unit-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs). Spanning the breadth of unit functions, including not only tactical operations but also support, communications, planning, reporting, and a host of other activities and processes, unit SOPs generally reflect the unique personalities and druthers of organizations and their commanders. In a modular Army in which the rapid tailoring of forces is the expected norm, the more unit SOPs

can be universalized the more they can contribute to teamwork and rapid, effective integration rather than impede and detract from it. To the extent practicable, doctrine for the modular Army should provide for common, shared standard operating procedures across the force.

## Teamwork

To be effective, units must be proficient in their internal core tasks and skills. They must also be proficient in operating as part of a larger team. Although not always possible in the exigencies of operations, units should strive to train as members of the specific team in which they will operate, before operations begin.

In building effective tailored forces, doctrine can provide a common foundation on which to base integration, but it can never supplant the value of developing familiarity and teamwork amongst the elements which will work together on the ground. As expressed by Brigadier General Frederic Butler, commander of Task Force Butler with which the 753rd operated in Southern France: "...best results are obtained when units have been trained together in the tactical entity in which they are to fight. Any sportsman realizes that a team of all-stars thrown together for the first time is far from an effective game-winning aggregation."<sup>113</sup>

That the 753rd quickly learned this is apparent in the record. After missing pre-deployment opportunities to train with the 45th ID while still stateside and in North Africa, the unit clearly sought to develop teamwork with later supported units prior to combat operations with them. This is evidenced in the training conducted with the 36th ID after Salerno, and with the New Zealand infantry at Cassino.

The value of teamwork is also illustrated in the 753rd's maturing partnership with the 36th ID over repeated operations throughout the course of the war, evolving from the early, disastrous commitment of A Company at San Pietro, to a clearly very effective and comfortable relationship during the final pursuit and exploitation into Germany. Indeed, the unit historical report for May 1945 specifically makes reference to the battalion's comfort in working with the division, and with the respective companies' relationships with the regiments they had come to habitually support.<sup>114</sup> The spirit of this relationship is reflected in a farewell letter to the battalion from the 36th ID Commanding General, Major General John Dahlquist, upon the battalion's separation from the division at the war's end:

The mutual respect, the comradeship, and the esprit de corps which together we have developed as a result of our victorious campaigns on the many fields of battle and in the face of continued hardships will be long valued and forever cherished. Yours is an enviable record and I am proud to have had the 753rd Tank Battalion as a part of my command...you wear the "T" Patch with as much pride and proprietorship as any other unit in the Division.<sup>115</sup>

The converse of such a relationship might be surmised from the battalion's experience with the 63rd ID late in the war. Costly battles with the recently-arrived and relatively inexperienced division apparently contributed to a difficult and short-lived relationship between C Company and the division's 253rd Infantry Regiment during operations in Southern Germany. Perhaps this could have been avoided had the units had opportunity to train and form a partnership prior to being thrust together into very difficult combat situations.

The experiences of the 753rd in this regard were common among the separate tank battalions in Europe, as reflected in the report of a post-war General Board study of the separate tank battalions. The board acknowledged that, "...had the (tank) battalion

been an organic unit and trained with the (infantry) division prior to combat, a better mutual understanding and spirit of cooperation would have prevailed.”<sup>116</sup> This observation contributed to the board’s first and strongest recommendation that a tank regiment should be assigned organically to each infantry division.<sup>117</sup>

Another General Board study following the war, one which specifically addressed the infantry divisions, described the insufficiencies of pre-combat tank-infantry training and the detrimental impact which resulted to operations across the force. That assessment led to this board’s concurrence with the recommendation for organic assignment of tank units to the infantry divisions.<sup>118</sup> The general sentiment toward tank-infantry teamwork was expressed by Brigadier General Jesse A. Ladd, commander of the 9<sup>th</sup> ID, who stated:

It is imperative that tanks and infantry function together with the closest cooperation. Tank units that fought continually with the same infantry division became an integral part of the team. This teamwork can only be developed by mutual knowledge and respect gained over a long period of time where the two units are in daily association.<sup>119</sup>

Although the concept of modularity has at its core the essential of flexibly assigning unit capabilities where needed to create mission-tailored forces, the benefit of training and building cohesive bonds with the team in which a unit is to operate cannot be overstated. Whenever possible, force tailored teams must have the opportunity to develop this teamwork prior to taking the operational field.

### Train as You Will Operate

Beyond training with the team with which a unit expects to operate, a unit must ensure it trains on those tasks and under those conditions which will be most likely required of it. In full-spectrum operations, these tasks and conditions may place

extraordinary demands on the unit and cause it to engage in activities that may not center on its core competencies or usual methodologies.

The 753rd quickly learned to adapt to the demands of the situations in which it found itself, although much of its education took place under fire. Proficient in its tank skills prior to deployment, the battalion had to develop its combined arms proficiencies in combat. An essential aspect of its nature as an infantry support unit, combined arms operations went largely unpracticed by the battalion prior to taking the field of battle.

Once employed in Sicily, the battalion improvised procedures for providing subordinate force packages to fight independently from the battalion in support of various infantry formations. Although these requirements may not have been fully appreciated or rehearsed before deployment, the battalion was quickly forced to become adept at their practice. Further, on a number of occasions, circumstances called upon the 753rd to form and employ combined arms task forces under its own command and control, receiving to the battalion attachment of a variety of units and capabilities for specific missions. This again was a requirement that was perhaps not anticipated and almost certainly not trained prior to the battalion's commitment to combat. Finally, the necessities of sustaining the battalion during continuous, protracted combat across long distances and wide fronts were realities likely not trained to prior to the war, but to which the unit had to readily adapt.

To the extent that unit leaders can envision the requirements and conditions under which the organization will be employed, they must seek to train to them. The Army's FM 7-0 outlines the challenges of training for full-spectrum operations. While acknowledging the burdens these challenges place on leaders, the manual offers no

easy solutions. The FM does, however, offer seven tenets to guide units of the modular Army in effectively training in a way that replicates the conditions they are likely to encounter in operations:

- Train for full spectrum operations and quick transitions between missions
- Train for combined arms proficiency and joint interdependence
- Train the fundamentals first
- Make training performance-oriented, realistic, and mission-focused
- Train for challenging, complex, ambiguous, and uncomfortable situations
- Integrate safety and Composite Risk Management throughout training
- Determine and use the right mix of Live-Virtual-Constructive training environments to replicate the operational environment chosen to provide the appropriate conditions for a particular training event.<sup>120</sup>

FM 7-0 also directs a system for managing unit training which centers on a unit's initially developing proficiency in core mission essential tasks, reflective of those types of missions for which the unit is designed. As the unit's employment becomes more imminent its training focus is adjusted to directed mission essential tasks, prescribed or approved by their wartime higher command, which are more specifically centered on those tasks and conditions anticipated for an upcoming mission.<sup>121</sup> This process holds great merit, so long as unit teams and mission sets can be established adequately in advance of operations. In cases where time or circumstances do not allow for thorough or methodical mission training with a gaining unit, doctrine would do well to offer tools for abbreviating the process.

### Sharing of Knowledge

Although it was one of 30 separate tank battalions that operated in Europe during World War II,<sup>122</sup> the 753rd rarely interacted with other tank battalions. Its experience, like that of most of its sister tank battalions, was largely in operating as an independent

unit, assigned wherever needed and generally not employed with other armor units. As a result, there existed relatively little opportunity to share lessons learned or other knowledge within the separate tank battalion community. Each battalion developed, for the most part, its own methodologies of conducting operations based on the unique experiences of its members. Certainly there could have been great value in sharing knowledge between these specialized battalions had more opportunity existed to do so. Exchange of hard-won lessons would have benefitted the effectiveness of all, and would have been of particular value to the later-arriving units.

Today's units have the benefit of multiple means by which they can learn from one another and share best practices. Army professional publications, the Center for Army Lessons Learned, the Battle Command Knowledge System, and a variety of specialized communities of practice and collaborative web-based networks all provide opportunities for rapid sharing of knowledge among like units. In utilizing these sources prior to deployment, or even once in theater, units can enter operations at a higher level on the learning curve than they would otherwise be able. The integration of insights from current operations into unit mission rehearsal exercises and Combat Training Center rotations are adding further dimensions to a unit's preparation, as are collaborations and virtual ride-alongs conducted by video teleconference with units already deployed.<sup>123</sup> Such means and mechanisms should be leveraged to the maximum extent possible, especially by specialized units that are likely to operate separately from others of their kind.



## Need for a Parent Headquarters

Although not overtly apparent in the unit record, one might infer that the 753rd would have benefitted from having a permanent parent headquarters as it was tasked about the theater in support of various divisions and task forces. Prior to the war, the Army had conceived the tank group (later renamed armored group) as a headquarters to provide temporary administrative and potentially tactical command for the several separate tank battalions attached to a corps or an army, but this concept fell short in practice.<sup>124</sup> A General Board assessment rendered after the war was that the retention of armored groups for the purpose of providing temporary higher headquarters for the tank battalions was not justified; the force would be better served by permanently assigning the tank battalions to the divisions.<sup>125</sup> As it was, there was a sense that the separate tank battalions, unless they developed a strong relationship with a habitually supported unit, were to a degree orphans on the battlefield, frequently suffering from misuse, over-use, or lack of adequate care, support, and oversight.

Although modern Army modular units may be designed to be flexibly tailored into mission-specific force packages, it would be beneficial for each to have a permanent higher headquarters that could ensure its provision and training in its specialized niche prior to deployment, and, if separated from the unit by deployment or by mission assignment once in theater, be a point of reach-back for unit-specific support, administration, and resolution of issues.

## Conclusion

The U.S. Army has committed to restructuring itself under a modular concept and is well on its way to achieving the vision of providing modular, strategically-responsive,

expeditionary force packages tailored to meet the specific needs of a Joint Force Commander and the demands of full-spectrum operations. The modular approach requires the Army's units to be of a nature that is inherently adaptable, flexible, and tailorable. But simply intending its forces to demonstrate these characteristics does not diminish the extraordinary demands such expected malleability places on units and leaders, although recent operational and tactical successes might belie the complexity and challenge. As the Army continues on its path toward modularity, it must glean all possible insights and lessons from its current operations to ensure it develops the most capable modular force possible. It should look to history as well, as potential glimpses into modularity abound in its forbears' experience. The combat experience of the 753rd Tank Battalion in World War II provides but one set of insightful impressions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, "Introduction to the Army Strategic Planning Guidance," in *The Army Plan FY 2006-2023* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 2006), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Francis J. Harvey and Peter J. Schoomaker, *A Campaign Quality Army With Joint and Expeditionary Capabilities: A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2007*, Posture Statement (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 2007), A-2.

<sup>3</sup> William M. Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Center for Military History, 2007), 3-17; Harvey and Schoomaker, A-1.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manual 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 2008), C-6; U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Task Force Modularity, *Army Comprehensive Guide to Modularity Version 1.0* (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 8 October 2004), 6-2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., C-8 – C-12. The five support brigades are the battlefield surveillance brigade which provides military intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance; the fires brigade which provides field artillery and target acquisition capabilities; the combat aviation brigade which provides multi-functional aviation support; the sustainment brigade which provides multi-functional logistical support, and the maneuver enhancement brigade which provides a variety of capabilities to support and protect to the force.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., C-12 – C-13. The functional brigades include engineer; military police; chemical biological, radiological, and nuclear; air and missile defense; and signal. The functional

brigades typically operate under theater army control however they can provide modular functional capabilities to BCTs or divisions as missions may require.

<sup>7</sup> Steven J. Zaloga, *US Tank and Tank Destroyer Battalions in the ETO 1944-45* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2005), 4-7; Jonathan M. House, *Combined Arms Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 64-68; Dennis Showalter, "America's Armored Might," *World War II* 20 (April 2005): 52-57.

<sup>8</sup> Zaloga, 4-7; House, 64-68; Showalter, 52-57.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Army Ground Forces Historical Section, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, Study Number 27 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Ground Forces Historical Section, 1946), 46-47; Zaloga, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Army Ground Forces: Organization of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Historical Section, 1947), 294; House, 136-139. In addition to separate tank battalions, other units for which the "pooling" concept was applied included tank destroyer, antiaircraft, and engineer battalions.

<sup>11</sup> Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, 279-280.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 72, 327.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Army Ground Forces Historical Section, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Zaloga, 19; The War Department, *Field Service Regulations, Operations*, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1941); The War Department, *Field Service Regulations, Operations*, Field Manual 100-5, (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1944); The War Department, *Armored Force Field Manual, Tactics and Technique*, Field Manual 17-10 (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1942); The War Department, *The Armored Battalion, Light and Medium*, Field Manual 17-33, (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1942); The War Department, *Tank Company, Light and Medium*, Field Manual 17-32 (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1942); The War Department, *Tank Battalion*, Field Manual 17-33, (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1944); The War Department, *Tank Company*, Field Manual 17-32 (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1944). A revised version of FM 100-5 released in June 1944 benefitted from insights garnered in operations in North Africa and Italy and served to further strengthen the combined arms doctrinal foundations. Revisions to the battalion and company-level tank manuals, released at the end of 1944, included insights gained from combat in North Africa and Italy, however, these documents were not published until very late in the war and still maintained a primary focus on armored operations.

<sup>15</sup> Zaloga, 19-20; The War Department, *Employment of Tanks With Infantry*, Field Manual 17-36 (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1944); The War Department, *Employment of Tanks With Infantry, Illustrated Problems*, Field Manual 17-36 Supplement 1 (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1944).

<sup>16</sup> Zaloga, 19; Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, 411.

<sup>17</sup> Greefield, Palmer, and Wiley, 411.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 416-417.

<sup>19</sup> Charles L. McNeill, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion, "Historical Data," memorandum for Armored Officer, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, 5 June 1945, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Charles L. McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion* (n.p.: n.p., 1985), 1-2. This document was privately prepared and distributed by the author, no publisher or place given.

<sup>21</sup> McNeill, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, "Historical Data," 1.

<sup>22</sup> Harry Yeide, *Steel Victory: The Heroic Story of America's Independent Tank Battalions at War in Europe* (New York: Presidio Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>23</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>26</sup> Anthony F. Daskevich, personal papers, undated. Comments are extracted from notes in personal papers found in the files of the author's father (deceased), wartime member of the 753rd Tank Battalion. Date or context in which the notes were prepared is unknown, possibly for remarks delivered to a civic organization or school after his retirement from the Army in 1975.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Army Adjutant General Records, 753rd Tank Battalion, undated. Extracted from microfilm files held at the Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

<sup>28</sup> The date of debarkation of 26 May is per the Adjutant General Records. There is a discrepancy on dates between these records and Colonel McNeill's history, which lists date of debarkation in Africa as 24 May. Colonel McNeill does not provide a specific date for the battalion's departure from the U.S., but he does specifically state the battalion experienced a 33-day transit, concluding on 24 May. The AG records indicate the battalion was in transit from 24 April to 26 May, which would total the 33 days that McNeill indicates.

<sup>29</sup> McNeill, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," memorandum for The Adjutant General, Washington D.C., 30 August 1943, 1; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>32</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Felber, 1.

<sup>34</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 4-11; Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign"; Marvin Jensen, *Strike Swiftly!: The 70th Tank Battalion From North Africa to Normandy to Germany* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1997), 86-97.

<sup>35</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 4-11; Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign"; Jensen, 86-97.

<sup>36</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," Annex 3, "Diary, Company C," 3.

<sup>37</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 4-11; Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," 1-6; Albert N. Garland, Howard McGaw Smyth, and Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1986), 361-367, 388-405, 406-415.

<sup>38</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 10; Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," 5 and Annex 3, "Diary, Company C," 4-5; Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, 406-415.

<sup>39</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company B," 4; Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, 416.

<sup>40</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," 5.

<sup>41</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," Annex 3, "Diary, Company C," 2.

<sup>42</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Sicilian Campaign," 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 12; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," memorandum for The Adjutant General, Washington, D.C., 1 October 1943, 2; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>45</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1993), 99.

<sup>47</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 1.

<sup>48</sup> Center of Military History, *Salerno: American Operations From the Beaches to the Volturno, 9 September – 6 October 1943* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1990), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 104.

<sup>50</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 1.

<sup>51</sup> Center of Military History, *Salerno: American Operations From the Beaches to the Volturno, 9 September – 6 October 1943*, 41-68; Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," 1-2 and Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 1-5.

<sup>52</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 2; Blumenson, 104; Center of Military History, *Salerno: American Operations From the Beaches to the Volturno, 9 September – 6 October 1943*, 41-45.

<sup>53</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 2; Blumenson, 105; Center of Military History, *Salerno: American Operations From the Beaches to the Volturno, 9 September – 6 October 1943*, 41-44.

<sup>54</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 2.

<sup>55</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 2; Center of Military History, *Salerno: American Operations From the Beaches to the Volturno, 9 September – 6 October 1943*, 56-57.

<sup>56</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Felber, "Operations of 753rd Tank Battalion (M) in Salerno Campaign," Annex 1, "Battalion Diary," 2, Annex 2, "Diary, Company C," 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Operations in Italy, November 1943," memorandum for Commanding General, 36th Infantry Division, 4 December 1943, 1; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>62</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Center of Military History, *Fifth Army at the Winter Line: November 1943 – 15 January 1944* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1990), 45.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 45-67.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Operations in Italy for December 1943," memorandum for Commanding General, 36th Infantry Division, 5 January

1944, 1; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>66</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), unit report, "Attack on San Pietro, Italy," 25 December 1943, 1-3; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Center of Military History, *Fifth Army at the Winter Line: November 1943 – 15 January 1944*, 59.

<sup>72</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), unit report, "Attack on San Pietro, Italy," 3-4. Of the two Valentines eventually received, only one was in operating order. A volunteer crew from C Company had only 24 hours to learn how to operate the vehicle.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), unit report, "Attack on San Pietro, Italy," 8; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for December," 5 January 1944, 2; Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Operations in Italy for December 1943," 1.

<sup>77</sup> Fred L. Walker, *From Texas to Rome: A General's Journal* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1969), 287.

<sup>78</sup> Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 277.

<sup>79</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Attack on San Pietro, Italy," 2-3; 753rd Tank Battalion Unit Message Logs, December 1943; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>80</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Felber, "Operations in Italy for December 1943," 2.

<sup>82</sup> George F. Howe, *The Battle History of the 1st Armored Division, "Old Ironsides"* (Washington, D.C.: Combat Forces Press, 1954), 271.

<sup>83</sup> Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 306-309; Howe, 270.

<sup>84</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, unit report, "Attack on Mount Porchio (sic)," 24 January 1944, 1-2; Headquarters, Task Force Allen, operations order, "Plan Resolution," 31 December 1943; Headquarters, Task Force Allen, "Operational Instructions" (Plan Chaffee), 31 December 1943; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, "Field Order #7," 3 January 1944. All on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>85</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, unit report, "Attack on Mount Porchio (sic)," 1-2; Headquarters, Task Force Allen, operations order, "Plan Resolution;" Headquarters, Task Force Allen, "Operational Instructions" (Plan Chaffee); Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, "Field Order #7."

<sup>86</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, unit report, "Attack on Mount Porchio (sic)," 2-3.

<sup>87</sup> Howe, 272-273; Center of Military History, *Fifth Army at the Winter Line: November 1943 – 15 January 1944*, 105-06.

<sup>88</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion, "Attack on Mount Porchio (sic)," 3-4; Howe, 272-273.

<sup>89</sup> Howe, 273.

<sup>90</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 27.

<sup>91</sup> Howe, 272-273; Center of Military History, *Fifth Army at the Winter Line: November 1943 – 15 January 1944*, 105-106.

<sup>92</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 28; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for January," 6 February 1944, 4; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Report of Operations in Italy for February 1944," memorandum for Adjutant General, Washington, D.C., 2 March 1944, 1-4; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>94</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 30-31; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for February," 2 March 1944, 2-4.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Field Order #8," 1-3; Headquarters, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, "Field Order #1," 14 March 44; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for March," 4 April 1944, 1-2; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Report of Operations in Italy for March 1944," memorandum for Adjutant General, Washington, D.C., 5 April 1944, 1-2. All on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>97</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 30-31; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for February," 2-4; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for



March," 1-2; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>98</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 32; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for the Month of April," memorandum for the Commanding General, Fifth Army, 2 May 1944, 1-2; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Unit Diary for April," 2 May 1944, 1-2.

<sup>99</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 33-34; John Sloan Brown, *Draftee Division: The 88th Infantry Division in World War II* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 109-111.

<sup>100</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 35.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 40-51; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for Month of August," 8 September 1944, 1-18; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>103</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 40-51; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for Month of August," 1-18; Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion "Report of McNeill Force August 21-23," undated; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; Jeffrey J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith, *The European Theater of Operations: Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1993), 126-170; Frederic B. Butler, "Southern France Exploits of Task Force Butler, Part I," *Armored Cavalry Journal* (March – April 1948): 12-18; Frederic B. Butler, "Southern France Exploits of Task Force Butler, Part II," *Armored Cavalry Journal* (May-June 1948): 30-38.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for Month of September," 17 October 1944, 1-2; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for Month of October 1944," 20 November 1944, 1-10; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 52-61.

<sup>105</sup> Felber, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for Month of October," 1-10; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for the Month of November 1944," 17 December 1944, 1-4; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 56-61.

<sup>106</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 66-67; Clarke and Smith, 499-512.

<sup>107</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 68-79; Joseph G. Felber, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Battalion Narrative for Month of March 1945," memorandum for the Commanding General, Seventh Army, 7 May 1945, 1-8; on file with original unit records at the

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<sup>108</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 79-86; McNeill, Headquarters 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for the Month of April 1945," Company C, 753rd Tank Battalion, "Company Narrative for the Month of April 1945," undated; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; Magus L. Froberg, William J. Scott, and Michael Baymor, *The 63rd Infantry Division Chronicles: June 1943 to September 1945* (63rd Infantry Division Association, 1991), 153-182.

<sup>109</sup> McNeill, *History of the 753rd Tank Battalion*, 91.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Training the Force*, Field Manual 7-0 (Publication Draft) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 18 December 2007), 2-9.

<sup>112</sup> U.S. Army Armored School, *Operation of the Separate Tank Battalion*, (Fort Knox: The Armored School, 1950), 93-94.

<sup>113</sup> Butler, "Southern France Exploits of Task Force Butler, Part II," 38.

<sup>114</sup> Charles L. McNeill, Headquarters, 753rd Tank Battalion (M), "Historical Narrative for the Month of May 1945," memorandum for the Commanding General, Seventh Army, 9 June 1945, 1; on file with original unit records at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>115</sup> John E. Dahlquist, Headquarters, 36th Infantry Division, Office of the Commanding General, "Departure of the 753rd Tank Battalion," memorandum for Commanding Officer, 753rd Tank Battalion, 11 June 1945. Document from the personal papers of the author's father, Anthony F. Daskevich, wartime member of the 753rd Tank Battalion.

<sup>116</sup> The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, *Study Number 50: Organization, Equipment, and Tactical Employment of Separate Tank Battalions* (U.S. Forces European Theater, undated), 4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>118</sup> The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, *Study Number 15: Organization, Equipment, and Tactical Employment of the Infantry Division* (U.S. Forces European Theater, undated), 13.

<sup>119</sup> The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, *Study Number 50: Organization, Equipment, and Tactical Employment of Separate Tank Battalions*, Appendix 2, 1.

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Training the Force*, Field Manual 7-0 (Publication Draft) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, undated), 2-4.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 4-7 – 4-11.

<sup>122</sup> The General Board, United States European Theater, *Study Number 50: Organization, Equipment, and Tactical Employment of Separate Tank Battalions*, 1.

<sup>123</sup> William S. Wallace, “Supporting an Expeditionary Army at War,” *Army Magazine* 57 (October 2007): 80.

<sup>124</sup> Yeide, 7-8; Zaloga, 8-9; Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, 328. Leadership of the Armored Force and the Army Ground Forces envisaged that armored groups might form the nucleus of temporary combined arms armored formations for specific missions, once appropriately task organized with battalions of tanks, armored infantry and artillery, and other arms and services as required. This notion rarely saw reality on the battlefield. In practice, the armored group headquarters only occasionally exercised command and control in combat, and more frequently provided higher headquarters administrative and supporting functions to the tank battalions only when in non-tactical settings or between attachments to infantry divisions. Eventually seen as unnecessary and redundant to other levels of command, the armored group headquarters were in time relegated to a variety of other tasks in theater or disbanded altogether.

<sup>125</sup> The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, *Study Number 51: The Armored Group* (U.S. Forces European Theater, undated), 2-4.